



Wal Hannington

## To be Ungendered

The title of the attached document, taken from a 1950 book called “Mr Chairman”, by Wal Hannington, on organisation, is a first-class example of the genderisation of a topic by careless or unconscious use of language.

“Mr Chairman” would seem to be a male. Of course, there is nothing in the book that explicitly states that a Chairperson has to be male.

Game, set and match! Wal Hannington can be found posthumously guilty in the court of Gender, and all his works can be condemned, along with those of countless other writers, especially in the English language, which is, or has in the past been “gendered” in a way that is quite resilient and difficult to avoid. Avoiding

“gendered” references of this kind in English takes a will, and constant effort.

But it would be a mistake to throw out Wal Hannington’s work, because in practice it is quite essentially “gender-sensitive”. The book is dedicated to making it possible for anyone to attend meetings without feeling left out, put down, or patronised. It strongly opposes the use of the chair in a patronising way towards the members of the meeting.

The book provides the instruments with which the ordinary members of a meeting are able to intervene and assert themselves in all necessary ways, so as to guide the chairperson, as much as to be guided by the chairperson.

The Chairperson is the main servant of the meeting, and is not the boss of the meeting, says Hannington.

One of the common complaints of feminists who would flee from structure, is that formal meetings are oppressive. They can be, but the remedy is not structurelessness. The remedy is to see how the structure can work, and is well designed to work, in a way that promotes fairness and democracy.

What is oppressive about meetings arises from ignorance of the procedure and of the rules of debate. Wal Hannington (who was a major communist leader in his lifetime) made time to create this work so as to help do away with both oppressive, and submissive, behaviour during meetings.

The attached document is a redaction of the most crucial parts of Hannington's book, as they relate to the most common types of meetings such as Branch meetings of mass democratic organisations.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Rules of Debate and Procedure of Meetings, Hannington, 1950.](#)
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